

SNIE 13-66

Current Chinese Communist Intentions
in the Vietnam Situation

4 August 1966

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JAN 2005

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SNIE 13-66
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SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

CURRENT CHINESE COMMUNIST
INTENTIONS IN THE VIETNAM SITUATION

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Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

4 August 1966

DATE

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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

4 August 1966

SUBJECT: SNIE 13-66: CURRENT CHINESE COMMUNIST INTENTIONS
IN THE VIETNAM SITUATION

CONCLUSION

The Chinese Communists have responded to recent US air action against North Vietnamese POL facilities and to Ho Chi Minh's July 17 appeal for more aid with massive propaganda demonstrations all over China. These occasions were used to renew pledges of complete support for Hanoi and to reiterate the Chinese view that the war must be continued to final victory. At the same time, the Chinese seem likely to provide more manpower for logistical and engineering functions in North Vietnam, and, for the first time, they may move some infantry troops into North Vietnam as a precautionary step against the contingency of invasion.

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We do not conclude, however, that the Chinese have changed their basic policy because of the recent air strikes. We have estimated that Peking would almost certainly intervene if North Vietnam were invaded or if the collapse of the Communist regime seemed likely. But we continue to believe that, at present levels of US action against NVN, China will not commit its ground forces to the war, nor its air force to deliberate and sustained action against US forces.

DISCUSSION

1. Peking has responded to the US air strikes on POL facilities in North Vietnam and to Ho Chi Minh's July 17 appeal for more aid with massive propaganda demonstrations all over China. The burden of the declarations made on these occasions is for the most part not new; that China is no longer bound by any restrictions in aiding North Vietnam, that China is a great "rear area" in the struggle, and that Peking and Hanoi are now ready to deal "joint blows" against the US. In addition, the Chinese have warned against underestimating their willingness to support Hanoi and have stated that China was prepared to make the greatest "national sacrifice" in this effort.

the Chinese Foreign Minister indicated that increased bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong and an invasion of North Vietnam would bring China into the war. Chen Yi argued that

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the US was following a course which would lead to heavier bombings, then to an invasion of North Vietnam, and finally to an attack on China.

2. It may be that Peking intended these various warnings to presage a more direct involvement in Vietnam. In again asserting a right to take action at any time and in any place, and in adding to this a total denunciation of the Geneva agreements, the Chinese could be laying the political and legal foundation for certain open military steps. It is possible, moreover, that they are unfolding new courses of action worked out with Ho Chi Minh more than a month ago when he is thought to have visited Peking.

3. On the other hand, the Chinese clearly had to take a hard line in response to the Hanoi-Haiphong bombings, particularly if they were not to be outdone by the Warsaw Pact declaration sponsored by the USSR. And the North Vietnamese mobilization order, which preceded the more significant of the Chinese declarations, called for "still more vigorous support" from all Communist countries.

4. Taking Chinese statements as a whole, we note that Peking has been careful to hedge any commitment to direct action and has purposely tried to portray China in a supporting rather than a direct role. It is significant that the Chinese have reiterated the Maoist doctrine that outside aid cannot "replace" the people's struggle and that the Vietnamese people "should and can rely on themselves" to prosecute the war. It seems

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likely that if China planned some direct participation in the war, it would adopt a less negative position on the value of outside assistance. Such a gratuitous reminder of the limits to outside aid may also have been intended to discourage Hanoi from accepting the Warsaw Pact offer of volunteers.

5. A complicating factor in judging Chinese intentions is the recent internal crisis. This situation has been confusing and we are far from certain as to its meaning and implications. It could be that after a period of turmoil, the Chinese leadership is now speaking with a new assurance and developing a bolder line on the Vietnam war. On the other hand, the "cultural revolution" must be creating considerable disarray in China, perhaps even within the armed forces, and this would seem to argue against a decision to go to war in Vietnam. Indeed, one theme of the campaign has been that the main enemies are inside China. Compared to the situation six months ago, there is apparently less emphasis in domestic propaganda on preparing the population for war with the US, by stressing civil defense, for example.

6. As to recent military indicators, there is no evidence thus far of significant movements of ground or air forces to South China. Nor are there other indicators of the sort that might be expected, if the Chinese leadership intended to commit ground forces to combat at an early date. Furthermore, there have been no movements indicating an intention to threaten military action in other areas such as Laos, Taiwan, or Korea.

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7. It seems probable, therefore, that the current Chinese line on Vietnam is designed mainly to serve a number of political purposes. Peking wants to provide a dramatic reassurance to North Vietnam, now that Hanoi has again rejected all overtures for negotiations and reaffirmed its intention to fight a long war. Since Chinese actions have been cautious, Peking also probably feels that some strong words are needed to augment concern in the US and elsewhere that China's intervention is becoming more imminent. The hoped for effect would be to deter a still further increase in the scale of attack on NVN. Finally, the Chinese seem intent on destroying any lingering hopes that a negotiated settlement can be arranged. To this end Peking, unlike Hanoi, has emphasized that the Geneva agreements are dead and can no longer be thought of as a basis for negotiations.

8. We conclude that the Chinese have not changed their basic policy because of the recent air strikes. We have estimated that Peking would almost certainly intervene if North Vietnam were invaded or if the collapse of the Communist regime seemed likely. But at present levels of US action against NVN we continue to believe that China will not commit its ground or air forces to sustained combat against the US. In our view, neither the Chinese nor the North Vietnamese regard the present situation as critical enough to justify outside intervention with its attendant risks of a much wider war, including ultimately the threat of nuclear war, which the Chinese must now reckon they would have to face without assurance

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of Soviet support. Hanoi still has considerable freedom of action vis a vis both Moscow and Peking, and Ho Chi Minh's polite refusal of Communist "volunteers" strongly suggests that North Vietnam is not moving to expand the war in this way.

9. This is not to say that Chinese involvement in the war will not grow, or that the Chinese will confine themselves to resounding phrases. Peking and Hanoi probably estimate that the war has entered a new and more intense phase with the Hanoi-Haiphong bombings and the rapid commitment of NVA troops to SVN. They anticipate a further US buildup, and Hanoi apparently intends to continue a heavy rate of infiltration into SVN. They probably also estimate that US air strikes against NVN will become more intense and widespread.

10. For some time Chinese military personnel have been present in North Vietnam; current strength is estimated at 25,000 to 45,000.* They include AAA troops, engineers, construction crews, and various other logistical support groups. More assistance of this nature is almost certain.

11. Hanoi and Peking may now believe that the time has come to move ahead with plans for greater Chinese support against the contingency of invasion. The Chinese are already apparently participating in the construction of a large base, perhaps including an airstrip, located some

* Lieutenant General Marshall S. Carter, Director of the National Security Agency, does not believe there is sufficient intelligence to support a numerical estimate of Chinese Communist troop strength in the DRV.

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75 miles northwest of Hanoi. The ultimate purpose of this base is unknown. Beyond this, it is possible the Chinese will move some infantry troops into North Vietnam.

12. Altogether, there is some reason to believe that the Chinese presence, and consequently influence in North Vietnam may grow, consonant with Hanoi's apparent resolution to continue the war for some time. We do not believe however, that recent Chinese behavior indicates that Peking has made a decision to enlarge the war by overt involvement of their forces against the US.

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